



ECSTASY: ROLLING ACROSS EUROPE



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Drug Enforcement Administration

ECSTASY: ROLLING ACROSS EUROPE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

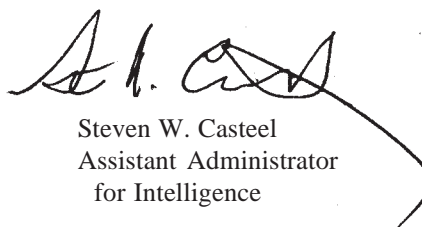
Over the course of the 1990s, the production, trafficking, and abuse of Ecstasy in Europe and internationally has grown exponentially. Initially, Ecstasy was associated with the rave scene; but since the late 1990s, its abuse has expanded, affecting a broader cross-section of society.

The majority of the world's Ecstasy continues to be produced in clandestine laboratories in the Netherlands and, to a lesser extent, Belgium. Given the increasingly global demand for the drug and the high profit potential derived from its sale, production will likely expand to other areas in the future.

Ecstasy trafficking within Europe continues to be dominated principally by European trafficking organizations, moving the drug to consumer markets via overland routes from the production zone. Though many European groups are involved in international Ecstasy trafficking, other groups, including Israeli and Russian drug traffickers, move significant quantities of Ecstasy to international markets, including North America.

At the Member State- and the European Union-level, governments are initiating and supporting counter-Ecstasy initiatives, including both law enforcement and public information campaigns. These efforts, coupled with continuing international cooperation, target all aspects of Ecstasy production, trafficking, and abuse.

Despite concerted efforts by European legislators and law enforcement officials, as well as their counterparts around the world, Ecstasy will likely remain one of the principal drugs of demand in Europe and internationally.



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INTRODUCTION

A retrospective evaluation of the drug situation in Europe, over the course of the 1990s, demonstrates an overall increase in the quantity of drugs (all categories) seized. During 1999, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) reported increases in the total quantity seized in all major drug categories, including cocaine, heroin, cannabis products, and Ecstasy.¹ The most significant increase in Europe, however, came in the seizure of Ecstasy tablets. According to INTERPOL, more than 14.1 million

Ecstasy tablets were seized during 1999, nearly triple the 1998 total. The higher seizure totals not only reflect the volume of illegal drugs flowing through the European market, but also more effective reporting of drug seizures in Europe.

During the mid-1990s, assessments of the Ecstasy situation in Europe noted the increasing threat posed by Ecstasy as party goers across the European continent were swept into the rave culture. By the late 1990s, the rave phenomenon had gained momentum internationally and the



Ecstasy threat was highlighted by unprecedented demand for the drug and an exponential increase in the number of tablets seized.

This report focuses on MDMA and other amphetamine analogues collectively known as Ecstasy, addressing the current trends in production, trafficking, and abuse in Europe.

¹ The most recent annual statistics available are utilized throughout this report.

PRODUCTION, TRAFFICKING, AND ABUSE

The decade of the 1990s witnessed an increase in the production, trafficking, and abuse of synthetic drugs, especially Ecstasy, throughout Europe.² The rave phenomenon served as the primary vehicle for the perpetuation of MDMA use, as young party goers turned to the drug to maintain the frenetic pace of the popular round-the-clock, high-decibel dance parties. The demand for Ecstasy paralleled the rave scene as it swept across Europe and arrived in the United States.

Production

Precursor Chemicals

An estimated 80 percent of the world's Ecstasy is produced in clandestine laboratories in the Netherlands and, to a lesser extent, Belgium using

a variety of precursor chemicals, such as safrole/isosafrole, 3,4-MDP2P (3,4-methylenedioxyphenyl-2-propanone), methylamine, etc., in combination with common chemicals. According to Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) reporting, the chemicals enter the region primarily from Asia, often via Eastern Europe. In addition, clandestine precursor chemical production laboratories have been reported in Eastern Europe.

During 1999, according to INTERPOL, several seizures of chemicals used in the production of Ecstasy were effected in Europe. One 5-metric-ton (MT) seizure of piperonal was made in Spain and another of 2.64 MT was effected in the Slovak Republic. The 2.64 MT shipment originated in China and transited Romania and Hungary enroute to the Slovak Republic. Slovak authorities also seized 4.4 MT of 3,4-MDP2P. This 3,4-MDP2P originated in Hong Kong and

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the late 1980s, a distinctive kind of music and dancing known as “acid house” or “techno” emerged on the Spanish resort island of Ibiza, known as “XTC Island,” a vacation destination popular with British youth and young adults. During the summer of 1988, the techno phenomenon took root in the United Kingdom as thousands of aficionados gathered to create what has been called Britain’s “Summer of Love.” These music-and-laser-light dance parties evolved into events known as “raves,” which were organized each weekend in warehouses and fields throughout England. To maintain the frenetic round-the-clock pace of this high-decibel, synthesized musical environment, participants turned to Ecstasy.³

The decade of the 1990s was marked by unprecedented growth in the demand for MDMA. Known by the street names Ecstasy, E, Adam, Empathy, or XTC, it gained popularity with rave- and club-goers across Europe as the “feel good” drug, inducing feelings of solidarity, openness, and contentment. The use of Ecstasy, however, may have long-lasting negative effects on the brain, such as altered memory function and motor skills.

Today, the rave and nightclub scenes remain popular across Europe, with these venues continuing to serve as the primary markets for Ecstasy. The consumer base is growing, however, and Ecstasy use is being reported by an increasingly broad cross-section of society.

² This increase in demand over the course of the 1990s is mirrored in the United States and other countries, paralleling the rave phenomenon, and is likely to continue to expand beyond the rave and nightclub scene as additional producers enter the market, increasing supply and lowering prices.

³ For the purposes of this report the terms Ecstasy and MDMA will be used interchangeably. In addition, to remain consistent with INTERPOL reporting, Ecstasy will refer to MDMA and other amphetamine analogues.



A chemical seizure

transited the Czech Republic and Hungary en route to the Slovak Republic. Slovak authorities believe this 3,4-MDP2P was being shipped for the illicit production of Ecstasy in the Slovak Republic or a neighboring country. In addition, during 1999, according to INTERPOL, one laboratory for the production of precursors for the synthesis of synthetic drugs was seized in Poland.

In October 2000, Dutch authorities seized 8,250 liters of 3,4-MDP2P in Rotterdam, Netherlands. According to Dutch counterparts, this shipment originated in China and arrived in Lisbon, Portugal, via maritime shipping container from Hong Kong. The 3,4-MDP2P was transported overland to the Netherlands. Based on current conversion rates, a spokesperson for the Dutch forensics laboratory estimated that this amount of 3,4-MDP2P might have produced over 112 million tablets of Ecstasy.

Production Laboratories and Capacity

During the 1960s, according to Dutch authorities, the Limburg and Brabant Provinces in the southern Netherlands, along the borders of Germany and Belgium, were known for large-scale amphetamine production. Throughout the 1990s, and today, this region continues to be utilized by producers of synthetic drugs, though the focus has become

Ecstasy. Many groups, including Dutch, Belgian, and Russian criminal organizations, are allegedly involved in the production of Ecstasy within the region.

Clandestine laboratories have traditionally been established in the rural areas of these provinces in the southern Netherlands and northeastern Belgium to minimize the likelihood of neighbors or passersby alerting authorities to the presence of the laboratories. The border regions also are attractive to traffickers, who hope to circumvent law enforcement officials by crisscrossing jurisdictions. Additionally, the proximity to

Germany, Luxembourg, and France offers easy access to markets and transportation hubs for export throughout Europe and internationally.

Laboratory responsibility generally is divided between production sites and tableting sites. These sites range in size from small, free-lance

THE SCHEDULING OF MDMA

MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxy-methamphetamine), also known as Ecstasy, was first synthesized in Germany circa 1912 and patented in 1914; however, it was never marketed. Since that time, MDMA has been inconclusively evaluated for clinical use and briefly considered as an appetite suppressant. Concerns regarding abuse prompted officials in the United States and the United Kingdom to place the drug on their controlled substances lists. In the United States, the DEA initiated the emergency designation of MDMA as a controlled substance in June 1985. In 1988, MDMA was classified in the United States as a Schedule I drug under the Controlled Substances Act. In the United Kingdom, the family of amphetamine drugs was scheduled through the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act. MDMA, specifically, was scheduled in 1977 through a Modification Order. Other European countries followed, with the Netherlands, Belgium, and Italy, to name a few, listing MDMA as a controlled substance in 1988.

THE EFFECTS OF ECSTASY

MDMA is a stimulant with mild hallucinogenic properties. It is generally administered in pill or capsule form, though it may also be sniffed, snorted, injected, or used in suppository form. The 2- to 8-hour high, or “roll,” usually is produced within 15 minutes of administration. Users are said to be “rolling” while under the influence of Ecstasy.

Rave-goers use the drug not only to sustain their frenetic pace during the all-night dance parties, but also to “feel good” and enhance the rave experience. Users maintain that Ecstasy amplifies the visual and tactile senses and produces feelings of well-being, contentment, empathy, and love. To magnify the effects of Ecstasy, users often inhale menthol products to stimulate dilated bronchi, and gaze at rapidly moving lights or glo-sticks to enhance visual acuity.

The “feel-good” effects produced by the use of Ecstasy, coupled with its consumption in tablet form, leads many users to believe that the drug is relatively harmless. However, according to the U. S. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), MDMA users face psychological risks similar to those associated with amphetamines and cocaine, including confusion, depression, sleep problems, drug cravings, severe anxiety, and paranoia. Recent research findings also link prolonged



Rave party-goer

Ecstasy use to damage to those parts of the brain responsible for thought and memory.

The physical symptoms of Ecstasy are many, and vary depending on the individual and other substances consumed. MDMA use increases heart rate and blood pressure. It causes involuntary teeth clenching, which users often attempt to prevent with pacifiers or lollipops; muscle tension; nausea; blurred vision; rapid eye movement; and fainting. As the body overheats, inducing sweating and dehydration, MDMA users consume large amounts of water. Dehydration, coupled with inadequate ventilation at many rave locations, have contributed to many MDMA-related deaths.

laboratories to large-scale professional-capacity laboratories. The level of technical expertise required for the production of Ecstasy is relatively high. However, there are indications that once a chemist establishes the “recipe” for the conversion process, individuals lacking formal chemistry training or expertise may assume daily operational responsibilities. This appears to be the case in Belgium, where detailed operating instructions have been found at seized laboratory sites.

During 1999, the majority of the Ecstasy production remained concentrated in the southern provinces of the Netherlands. According to the Dutch Annual Synthetic Drug Statistical Report, 23 MDMA-related laboratories were seized during 1999. Laboratory seizures for 2000 will likely exceed 1999 totals, with 23 laboratories seized through October 2000. Among the laboratories seized by Dutch authorities, during 2000, was the largest MDMA production site

located in the Netherlands to date.

Seizures at this site included 300 kilograms of MDMA powder and approximately 49,000 liters of precursor chemicals.⁴

In addition, Dutch

authorities discovered 44 cylinders of hydrogen gas, several hundred pieces of glassware, and almost 4,000 liters of chemical waste.



Laboratory equipment



A tableting machine

Ecstasy production also has been reported in countries neighboring the Netherlands. According to German authorities, one laboratory of multiregional significance, capable of producing approximately 300,000 tablets, was seized during 1999. During the same time period, according to INTERPOL, four Ecstasy laboratories were dismantled in Belgium. Two of these laboratories were seized in the Limburg Province of northern Belgium, near the border with the Netherlands.⁵ Both laboratories were professionally equipped, and capable of large-scale production.⁶ During 2000, Belgian authorities dismantled 10 laboratories.

Although Western Europe has traditionally been the focal point of Ecstasy production, some minor production has been reported in Eastern Europe. More production is likely to develop in the future given rising demand and the large profit potential of Ecstasy trafficking. The countries of Eastern

Europe are perfectly positioned to emerge as producers of Ecstasy, given a combination of factors including the availability of highly skilled and educated chemists, access to chemicals, and established networks for the manufacture and trafficking of synthetic drugs—primarily amphetamine.

During 1999, according to INTERPOL, two laboratories for the production of Ecstasy were discovered in the Ukraine. In addition, during 1999, Estonian police found evidence of synthetic drug laboratories believed to be producing Ecstasy. Estonian, Finnish, and Swedish authorities believe that Ecstasy laboratories in Estonia are supplying the Nordic and Baltic markets. This region may also be receiving Ecstasy from Latvia. Authorities in Hungary report that Ecstasy is produced within their country.

⁴ According to the Dutch Unit Synthetic Drugs (USD), 1 kilogram of MDMA powder can be made into approximately 12,500 MDMA tablets. Using this conversion formula, the USD estimates that the 300 kilograms of MDMA powder seized was sufficient to produce approximately 3,750,000 tablets.

⁵ Limburg Provinces exist in the southern Netherlands and northern Belgium.

⁶ According to the DEA Brussels Country Office (BCO), Belgian authorities seized 450,000 Ecstasy tablets at one of the sites. In addition, 19 logo punches and one tableting machine (manufactured in India) were confiscated. As of May 2000, this seizure represented the largest Ecstasy seizure in Belgium. A second site discovered by Belgian authorities resulted in the seizure of 20,000 Ecstasy tablets, a tableting machine, vacuum-sealing equipment, and precursor chemicals.

WHOLESALE AND RETAIL ECSTASY PRICES FOR WESTERN AND EASTERN EUROPE

Estimated Ecstasy Price per Tablet Amounts Shown in US Dollars

Country	Wholesale	Retail
Netherlands	\$1.00 - \$2.00	\$7.00 - \$12.00
Belgium	\$1.00 - \$2.00	\$7.00 - \$12.00
Italy	\$4.00 - \$5.00	\$25.00 - \$30.00
Scandinavia	\$5.00 - \$8.00	\$10.00 - \$20.00
UK	\$1.00 - \$3.00	\$15.00 - \$18.00
Ireland	\$1.00	\$10.00
Germany	N/A	\$5.00 - \$15.00
Switzerland	N/A	\$6.00 - \$35.00
Spain	\$2.00 - \$3.00	\$4.75 - \$17.00
France	N/A	\$20.00 - \$30.00
Poland	N/A	\$3.00
Czech Republic	N/A	\$13.00
Hungary	N/A	\$5.00 - \$7.50
Romania	N/A	\$6.00 - \$8.00
Slovenia	N/A	\$9.00 - \$15.00
United States	\$8.00 - \$10.00	\$20.00 - \$40.00

Sources: DEA Country Offices: The Hague, Rome, Copenhagen, London, Vienna, Berlin, Madrid, Paris, Bern, 2000.

Although no significant laboratory seizures have been reported in the Czech Republic or Slovak Republic since 1995, significant seizures of 3,4-MDP2P in the Slovak Republic may be indicative of Ecstasy production in that country or its neighbors.

Production Hazards

Ecstasy production is not a risk-free enterprise. Due to the unstable nature of the precursor chemicals, combined with the relative inexperience of the chemists manufacturing the drug, the clandestine laboratories are at risk of explosion. In addition, with the growing number of Ecstasy laboratories in Europe, environmental degradation increasingly is a concern, given the illegal disposal of hazardous waste. According to the Dutch USD, during 1999, more than 100 such dump sites were identified, primarily in the southern Netherlands and near Amsterdam.

The disposal of chemical waste is likely to gain attention in the future, as Ecstasy manufacturers, in

an effort to avoid detection, transport the chemical waste products across borders and dump them in neighboring countries. According to the DEA Berlin Country Office, the number of burned vehicles found in Germany containing chemical waste from clandestine laboratories is on the rise.

Cost/Price Structure

Ecstasy is attractive to traffickers due to the significant profits derived from its sale, not only in Europe, but throughout the world. According to DEA reporting, in the Netherlands, the initial investment required to establish a MDMA laboratory is the equivalent of between US\$30,000 and US\$70,000, depending on the size and production capacity of the laboratory. The average production cost per tablet in the Netherlands is the equivalent of between US\$0.25 and US\$0.50. Wholesale prices per tablet in the Netherlands range between US\$1 and US\$2 and street or club prices range between US\$7 and

US\$12. As a result, even close to the production region, Ecstasy traffickers net significant profits at the street level.

Trafficking

Trafficking in Europe

Europe's economic prosperity, sophisticated transportation and communications infrastructures, and reputable financial system have, for years, attracted those engaged in both legitimate and illegitimate commerce. Europe's attractiveness to drug traffickers may increase as the European Union (EU) Member States move forward with single-market reforms, continue free movement under the Schengen Agreement, and consider further steps toward broader and deeper integration.⁷

Attracted by the profits associated with Ecstasy, traffickers smuggle the drug from the Netherlands and Belgium to markets in neighboring countries and internationally. According to DEA reporting, European traffickers, including Dutch, Belgian, and Russian criminal organizations, commonly are involved in Ecstasy smuggling, not only as producers and principal traffickers, but also as logistical support to other smuggling groups.

In addition to European trafficking groups, DEA reporting demonstrates the involvement of Israeli criminal organizations in Ecstasy smuggling. There are indications that some of these smuggling groups include individuals of Russian or Georgian descent, who hold Israeli citizenship. The Israeli criminals primarily are involved in the transportation of MDMA to consumer markets outside Europe, relying on "producer groups" for

the supply of Ecstasy.⁸ The DEA's BCO reports clearly established links to Israeli groups in 12 of the 39 Ecstasy cases initiated by the BCO between 1998 and 2000.

Belgium's role as a major center in the international diamond trade often is exploited by the Israeli drug trafficking groups. These traffickers often take advantage of their ethnic connections within the diamond-trading community in an effort to avoid detection by law enforcement officials. The connections to the diamond industry also provide Israeli traffickers with a well-established infrastructure in which to operate. In addition, custom-made luggage designed for transporting diamonds is readily available in Antwerp. This luggage is well-suited for use by drug traffickers smuggling Ecstasy.

Israeli traffickers generally are young, well-educated, and multilingual, often with Hebrew/Yiddish, English, and Russian language ability. The groups are highly adaptable and mobile, maintaining contacts throughout Europe and internationally. They use a variety of technologies for communication purposes.

Ecstasy trafficking spans the European Continent, with the countries neighboring the source zone not only serving as markets for Ecstasy, but also as transshipment points. Within Europe, local European organizations control Ecstasy trafficking and obtain the drug in the Netherlands and Belgium.

- In Austria, law enforcement authorities report that Ecstasy is smuggled into the country by traffickers from Belgium, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and the Netherlands.

⁷ Signatories to the Schengen Agreement permit the unfettered movement of goods, services, labor, and capital within the Schengen area which is composed of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden.

⁸ Law enforcement initiatives targeting Israeli Ecstasy trafficking groups will likely be aided in the future by new money laundering legislation passed by the Government of Israel on August 8, 2000. This legislation criminalizes money laundering, creates procedures for criminal and civil forfeiture of the proceeds of money laundering, introduces reporting of the transfers of currency into and out of Israel, and authorizes the issuance of regulations requiring the reporting of irregular transactions by Israeli financial institutions. According to the U.S. Department of State, Israel is in the process of establishing a money laundering authority to coordinate information and activities with Israeli police, customs, banks, and all other relevant entities.

- The DEA Berlin Country Office reports that Ecstasy trafficking from Germany to the United States has increased, with the majority of the trafficking controlled by Israeli groups from the Netherlands. Among the smuggling methods used by traffickers moving Ecstasy from Germany to North America is express mail. INTERPOL reporting indicates that, according to the German police, more than 700 kilograms of Ecstasy (approximately 2,100,000 tablets)⁹, in at least 50 deliveries, were sent from Germany to the United States between March and August 1999. According to INTERPOL, the Ecstasy tablets in these cases were produced in the Netherlands, concealed in boxes of puzzles, and transported via passenger vehicle across the border into Germany. The packages were sent to North America via express mail.
- Over the past several years, according to the DEA Paris Country Office, a significant increase in the use of airports in France by couriers smuggling Ecstasy to the United States has been noted.
- Most Ecstasy enters the United Kingdom via the Channel ports concealed in vehicles or in freight. The sources of supply reportedly are located in the Netherlands and Belgium. Synthetic drugs increasingly have been found in “cocktail” loads, (large shipments containing a variety of drugs).
- According to the DEA Rome Country Office, the opening of Italy’s borders to neighboring countries in 1998 under the Schengen Agreement facilitated the trafficking of drugs from other European countries. According to Italian authorities, the Netherlands is the source country for 85 percent of the MDMA found in Italy.
- Much of the Ecstasy available in the Nordic countries is smuggled by groups from the Netherlands and Belgium in conjunction with local traffickers. In a recent investigation, Swedish law enforcement officials arrested four subjects: two Dutch nationals; one Swedish national; and one Yugoslavian national, following the seizure of 100,000 Ecstasy tablets. Danish law enforcement counterparts report that most of the MDMA being seized in Denmark originates in the Netherlands, although authorities suspect laboratories in the Czech Republic and Poland also supply Ecstasy to the region.
- Icelandic police continue to report their suspicions that members of outlaw motorcycle gangs are involved in MDMA trafficking in Iceland. In addition, seizure information demonstrates that Iceland is used as a transshipment country for Ecstasy destined for North America. According to the U.S. Customs Service (USCS), between June and November 2000, Ecstasy seizures were effected from couriers arriving on international flights from Iceland at airports in New York, Maryland, and Massachusetts.
- U.S. Department of State reporting indicates that Ecstasy is smuggled into Poland overland from the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany. Couriers utilize passenger rail to smuggle Ecstasy from the source region to the Slovak Republic.
- According to INTERPOL, Hungarian trafficking groups control the smuggling and distribution of Ecstasy within Hungary, where most of the Ecstasy is destined for local consumption. The sources for Ecstasy available in Hungary, according to INTERPOL, are the Netherlands and Germany.
- Slovenian authorities indicate that traffickers in Ljubljana, Slovenia, are obtaining Ecstasy from the Netherlands and Belgium and

⁹ This calculation was determined using the INTERPOL conversion factor: 1 kilogram of Ecstasy tablets by weight equals 3,000 tablets.

smuggling it into Florida. During 1998, Slovenian police noted an increase in the amount of Ecstasy seized from individual Slovenian nationals transporting the drug from the Netherlands and Hungary.

- DEA reporting indicates that much of the Ecstasy in Estonia is smuggled from Western Europe by young people traveling to the region on holiday or for educational purposes. Estonian police report that most Ecstasy dealers appear to be young, ethnic Estonians with connections to Estonian traffickers

operating in other parts of Europe. Ecstasy has also been smuggled from the Netherlands to the United States via Estonia.

- Lithuanian police report the increased availability of Ecstasy within the country, with intelligence pointing to laboratories in Poland as the source of supply. Polish criminal groups are allegedly involved in the transportation and distribution of Ecstasy not only within Lithuania, but also to the Nordic countries.

GLOBAL TRAFFICKING

Ecstasy trafficking from Europe is increasingly a global concern.

The United States and Canada

Over the course of the 1990s, as the rave phenomenon swept across the Atlantic and permeated North America, the demand for Ecstasy followed. Ecstasy seizures in the United States and Canada have increased steadily over the course of the past decade, from 196 tablets seized by the DEA in the United States in 1993 to more than 3 million tablets seized by the DEA in 2000, according to preliminary estimates. Several large seizures of Ecstasy during 2000 have propelled totals to record levels. In July 2000, the DEA and the USCS in Los Angeles made a record seizure of more than 2 million Ecstasy tablets in an air freight shipment arriving from France. In November 2000, the DEA, the USCS, and the FBI, in conjunction with state and local law enforcement authorities in Florida, seized approximately 635,000 Ecstasy tablets and arrested three Hungarian nationals. Also during November 2000, authorities in New York seized approximately 600,000 Ecstasy tablets. This scenario was mirrored in Canada. In September 2000, Canadian authorities intercepted two sizeable Ecstasy shipments, the largest, a seizure

of approximately 246,000 Ecstasy tablets, was discovered on a ship at the Port of Montreal. The shipment originated in Belgium.

Air couriers and mail parcels remain the primary method for traffickers transporting Ecstasy shipments to the United States and Canada. New York City, Miami, Los Angeles, Montreal, and Toronto are the primary ports of entry for couriers arriving from both major and secondary European airports. Newark, Pittsburgh, Atlanta, New Orleans, Houston, Dallas, San Francisco, San Diego, Seattle, Boston, and Baltimore are gaining popularity with Ecstasy traffickers entering the United States.

Asia and the Pacific

DEA and INTERPOL reporting indicates increasing trafficking of MDMA to the Asia-Pacific region. Historic ties between Europe and Southeast Asia, stemming from the colonial period, facilitate this pattern. INTERPOL has reported several seizures that occurred between January 1999 and August 2000 that involved ethnic Chinese from Singapore and Malaysia who smuggled heroin to Europe and returned to Asia with Ecstasy. Often, the smuggling routes entailed travel from Amsterdam to Malaysia, Singapore, or

Indonesia, with further distribution of the drug in Australia and other Asia-Pacific countries.

Several significant seizures of MDMA have recently been effected in the Asia-Pacific region. In June 2000, INTERPOL Hong Kong reported the arrest of a Dutch national of Chinese origin and the seizure of 320,000 Ecstasy tablets. The contraband was found in the subject's luggage. The tablets were described as beige in color and bearing the Mitsubishi logo. This seizure was the largest of its kind reported by INTERPOL Hong Kong, as of August 2000.

In September 2000, Japanese authorities effected the largest single seizure of Ecstasy in Japan to date, seizing 25,383 Ecstasy tablets and arresting one subject pursuant to a customs inspection. The Ecstasy was concealed within the false sides of a suitcase. According to Japanese authorities, this seizure was valued at the equivalent of US\$1.12 million.

Ecstasy use has been reported throughout the Asia-Pacific region. In Singapore, in the late 1990s, law enforcement officials initiated enforcement efforts aimed at certain nightclubs, discotheques, and karaoke bars, resulting in increased arrests and seizures related to Ecstasy. During 2000, Ecstasy use reportedly increased in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Australia. Limited MDMA use also has been reported among the wealthy in Bangkok, Hong Kong, and Shanghai, although it is not yet considered a serious problem.

Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America and the Caribbean are becoming transshipment regions for Ecstasy destined for North America. DEA and INTERPOL reporting indicated that, as law enforcement officials began to focus their attention on the smuggling methods and routes utilized to move Ecstasy from the source area to North America, organizations

simultaneously altered their modus operandi to avoid detection, turning to new transshipment points in Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition, reporting indicates that traffickers increasingly are engaged in "two-way" smuggling—moving cocaine from Latin America to Europe and returning to North America with Ecstasy.

Beginning in 1999, Brazilian authorities noted indications that MDMA was distributed in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Prior to 1999, Brazilian authorities seized a total of only 2,300 capsules of Ecstasy in Brazil, all of which had been imported. In October 1999, the Brazilian National Police (DFP) conducted a controlled delivery, seizing 60 kilograms of Ecstasy—the largest quantity seized in Brazil to date—at the Sao Paulo International Airport.

In August 2000, DFP officials seized 2.6 kilograms of MDMA and the first MDMA laboratory in Brazil. The chemicals seized in the laboratory had the potential to provide approximately 10,000 capsules. Brazil is the largest producer of chemicals in South America, with approximately 24,500 chemical handlers registered in the country. This availability of chemicals may foster the continuation of MDMA processing in Brazil.

The DEA The Hague Country Office, reports an increase in the number of couriers smuggling Ecstasy to locations in Latin America and the Caribbean, including Mexico and the Dominican Republic, aboard commercial flights originating in Amsterdam and other European cities. The historic ties between the Netherlands and current and former members of the Dutch realm, Aruba, the Netherlands Antilles, and Suriname, are exploited by traffickers, who use the countries as transshipment points. The DEA BCO also notes recent investigations involving trafficking groups with connections to the Dominican Republic and Suriname.

The Caribbean's numerous and established drug transportation groups, abundance of couriers, and extensive network of commercial flights provide traffickers with easy access to route MDMA through the Caribbean to the United States. During 2000, Ecstasy seizures in the Caribbean ranged from fewer than 10,000 tablets to more than 50,000 tablets, including the seizure of 58,632 tablets from an individual arriving in Nassau, The Bahamas, from London, England.

Several seizures of MDMA en route to, or in, Mexico were reported during 2000, including an April seizure of approximately 200,000 tablets seized by Mexican authorities at the Mexico City International Airport. The Ecstasy arrived in an air cargo shipment manifested as aircraft parts. The shipment was en route to South Carolina from the Netherlands. In September 2000, Dutch authorities seized 1.25 million tablets of Ecstasy in the Netherlands. The tablets allegedly were destined for Mexico and eventually the United States.

Trafficking Methods

Trafficking organizations utilize a variety of methods to smuggle Ecstasy from the Netherlands and, to a lesser extent, Belgium to various parts of the globe. These countries have long-standing mercantilist traditions and are known for their role as centers for distribution of products throughout Europe and around the world. Their sophisticated intermodal transportation systems include access to local and international airports, world-renowned seaports, extensive railroads, inland waterways, and road transportation companies. These transportation services, coupled with express mail and cargo services, frequently are exploited by traffickers for moving their illegitimate cargo throughout Europe and internationally.

Commercial Air

Commercial air couriers commonly are used for transporting Ecstasy to international markets. Although these individuals carry relatively small amounts of Ecstasy, travel options are ample and flights frequent from Europe's major international airports. Ecstasy frequently is smuggled in carry-on or checked baggage, though external body packages also are used. Couriers often use customized luggage, designed with hidden compartments such as those used for transporting



Courier using external carry

diamonds. To avoid detection by law enforcement officials, trafficking organizations employ a variety of people as couriers, from young American and European women to male Orthodox Jews.

The major airports in Europe are the traditional ports of departure for couriers. During 1999, for example, INTERPOL reported that more than 900,000 Ecstasy tablets were seized at, or transited, German airports en route to the United States. Further, more than 1 million tablets destined for the United States were seized, or transited, Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport and more than 850,000 tablets were seized at Brussels' Zaventem Airport. Similar findings were reported for the airports in Paris and London where approximately 550,000 and 150,000 tablets were seized, respectively.



Express mail seizures in Europe



Illicit air cargo

As both trafficking organizations and law enforcement become increasingly sophisticated, routes are likely to diversify. INTERPOL reporting for 1999 noted a movement away from the major European airports by international Ecstasy smugglers. Increasingly, couriers are using secondary, or less heavily traveled, airports (in the region) with flights to the United States, including airports in Switzerland, the Czech Republic, and Iceland. During 2000, several Ecstasy seizures involving couriers arriving at U.S. ports of entry from Iceland were effected. These couriers obtained the Ecstasy and initiated travel in the Netherlands.

Rail and Road

Within Europe, Ecstasy is smuggled primarily overland in private automobiles or commercial

vehicles, with the drugs concealed on a courier's body, in luggage or cargo, or secreted within the chassis of the vehicle. Car ferries frequently are utilized for smuggling Ecstasy into the United Kingdom and Scandinavia. Ecstasy also is smuggled by rail. Traffickers exploit both passenger and commercial rail travel for distribution to southern Europe.

Express Mail

Express mail parcels have grown in popularity as a means for smuggling Ecstasy and other contraband. A variety of companies offer express delivery service from Europe to locations internationally. Through the use of these express mail service companies, traffickers are able to send packages with virtual anonymity, using false identification as well as false return-address and addressee information. Using these companies also allows traffickers to monitor the progress of shipments on the Internet. Any unusual delays can be identified quickly by the traffickers, alerting them not to pick up or accept packages when they arrive. Although express mail is attractive to traffickers for the reasons stated above, the capacity of express mail packages limits the quantity of Ecstasy sent in each shipment.

Express mail parcels are among the most popular methods for moving Ecstasy from Europe to the United States. Throughout the late 1990s, as law enforcement scrutiny of express mail parcels increased in the Netherlands, traffickers moved their transportation operations to Germany, using express mail service centers located along the Netherlands–Germany border. According to the DEA Frankfurt Resident Office, during 1999 and 2000, as German law enforcement officials targeted the use of express mail services for Ecstasy smuggling, traffickers shifted their transportation operations toward France, Spain, Switzerland, and other European countries. This trend is likely to continue, with traffickers shifting their transportation operations further south and east to avoid pressure from law enforcement officials.

Air and Sea Cargo

As demand for Ecstasy increases around the globe, the volume of Ecstasy smuggled to international markets will increase correspondingly. To transport larger quantities of Ecstasy, traffickers are likely to use air and sea cargo. With Europe's sophisticated transportation networks and access to air and maritime commerce through numerous airports and container ports, these methods are likely to become increasingly popular in the future.

In July 2000, the USCS and the DEA in Los Angeles, California, seized approximately 2.1 million Ecstasy tablets arriving from France. The tablets were smuggled via airfreight.

In August 2000, Canadian authorities seized 84 kilograms of MDMA concealed within a containerized maritime shipment of auto parts. The drugs were concealed in a 20-foot container, which originated in Belgium. The auto parts were destined for Toronto.

ABUSE

According to the European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) *Annual Report on the State of the Drugs Problem in the European Union 2000*, Ecstasy and amphetamine are the second most commonly abused drugs in Western Europe, following cannabis products. The EMCDDA estimates that between 1 and 5 percent of individuals, ages 16 to 34, in Europe have taken Ecstasy and/or amphetamine. This may, in part, be a result of the fact that Ecstasy is viewed by many users as a "recreational" drug, given the method of consumption, tablet form, and the belief that few, if any, harmful side effects result from its use. The Ecstasy-user population is expanding beyond the rave scene, with MDMA reportedly being sold in schools, at sports events, and at other social gatherings in Europe.

EMCDDA treatment data indicates that Ecstasy, amphetamine, and hallucinogens were the main drugs in approximately 1- to 2-percent of treatment admissions across Western Europe, while an estimated 65 to 95 percent were for opiate (primarily heroin) use.¹⁰

In Central and Eastern Europe, according to the EMCDDA, the popularity of all synthetic drugs has grown over the last 4 years, and has become an important part of the youth dance culture.

Law enforcement and treatment officials across the European Continent remain concerned about Ecstasy's popularity and use among young people.

- In the Netherlands and Belgium, the continued use of MDMA by young people remains a problem, with Ecstasy widely available at relatively low prices. The Ecstasy problem has potential for expansion as young people not only use this drug in association with dance clubs or rave parties, but in other venues as well.
- Law enforcement counterparts in the Nordic countries have expressed growing concern regarding the use of Ecstasy. In Denmark, police report that MDMA abuse is the fastest growing problem among 15 to 25 year olds and is allegedly the new drug of choice among Danish adolescents.
- Authorities in the Baltic States are concerned about the increasing availability and use of Ecstasy in the region. Estonian counterparts report that Ecstasy increasingly is available in the larger cities, especially Tallinn, the capital. Ecstasy is appealing to young Estonians based on the notion that it is "western" and "fashionable." Latvian authorities identify Ecstasy as one of their major drug concerns. Poland allegedly is a source for the Ecstasy available in Lithuania, where the drug often is considered an essential component of the alternative youth subculture.

¹⁰ Information contained in the EMCDDA *Annual Report on the State of the Drugs Problem in the European Union 2000*.

- In Germany, Ecstasy is increasingly in demand. According to INTERPOL, during 1999, first-time use of Ecstasy in Germany increased by 12 percent, while first-time users of all other drugs declined. In Austria, counterparts report that Ecstasy has replaced heroin as the drug of choice among the younger population. Hungarian authorities report that an estimated 150,000 youth use Ecstasy. The drug is linked to discotheques and raves. According to an April 2000 press report from Hungary, Ecstasy use has increased 7.5 percent over the last 4 years.
- Ecstasy, the drug of choice in Switzerland for a number of years, is used primarily by young people at rave parties. According to the DEA Bern Country Office, Ecstasy normally is consumed in cocktails with cocaine and alcohol.
- Ecstasy is available widely in France, both at rave parties and at nightclubs. It is not confined to large metropolitan areas, but increasingly is found in smaller towns and rural areas.
- Ecstasy is widely available in the United Kingdom, though largely associated with the dance club scene. According to British authorities, the United Kingdom is the largest market in the EU for the consumption of synthetic drugs, particularly amphetamine and Ecstasy, with estimated consumption of over 50 million MDMA tablets annually. British youth remain the primary consumers of Ecstasy and other synthetic drugs. However, British police speculate that young adults may be turning away from Ecstasy and reverting to marijuana as their preferred drug of choice due to Ecstasy's negative publicity.
- The use of Ecstasy has become an accepted part of the discotheque and nightclub lifestyle in the larger metropolitan areas of Spain and Portugal. MDMA also is sold in discotheques in Italy, where, according to the United National Inter-Regional Crime and Justice Research Institute study on European police activity and drug abuse, there are from 10,000 to 20,000 consumers of Ecstasy. One Ecstasy-related fatality was reported in Italy during 1999 and one in 2000.
- Slovak authorities have special concerns regarding the increasing availability and use of Ecstasy, especially among young people in economically disadvantaged parts of the Slovak Republic. In Bulgaria, Ecstasy is an increasing problem among university students. Synthetic drugs, including Ecstasy, are increasing in popularity within the rave and nightclub scene in Romania. According to the chief of Romania's Anti-Drug Division of the National Police, the consumption of Ecstasy produced in the Netherlands and Poland is increasing.
- Authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia all report concern over the rise in use and availability of Ecstasy.
- Croatian authorities report that Ecstasy is one of the primary drugs of abuse, with use on the rise. Slovenian authorities report an increase in overall drug consumption, especially Ecstasy and heroin. The market for hallucinogens, such as Ecstasy, smuggled into Slovenia from the Netherlands, reportedly is increasing.
- In Moldova, synthetic drugs, such as Ecstasy, are available and relatively inexpensive, making them popular with young people. In Ukraine, Ecstasy is popular and found in expensive nightclubs and casinos. It is, however, reportedly too expensive for average Ukrainians.

SEIZURES

According to INTERPOL, Ecstasy seizures in Europe increased dramatically over the past decade. In fact, European Ecstasy seizures during 1999 (14.1 million tablets) nearly tripled the 1998 total (5 million tablets) and the trend continued during the first half of 2000, with more than 8.4

million tablets seized. This trend was mirrored on a global scale with INTERPOL reporting global Ecstasy seizures during 1999 at approximately 22 million tablets, compared to 5.6 million tablets in 1998.

INTERPOL reporting indicated that at least 1.6 million of the Ecstasy tablets seized in Europe during 1999 ultimately were destined for the United States. An additional 1 million tablets that were seized in Europe were destined for other consumer markets around the world.

- During 1999, Dutch law enforcement reported the seizure of 3,660,496 tablets of Ecstasy. With several significant seizures thus far in 2000, seizure statistics for the year will exceed 1999 totals. On July 23, 2000, Dutch authorities seized approximately 510,000 Ecstasy tablets¹¹ from two sea containers in Hoofddorp, the Netherlands. In addition to the Ecstasy, authorities seized 330 kilograms of amphetamine tablets, 6,500 kilograms of cutting powder, and an advanced tableting machine. On September 6, 2000, Dutch counterparts seized 1.25 million Ecstasy tablets in a garage in Almere, Netherlands.
- In Belgium, 1999 seizures far exceeded 1998 totals, with Belgian authorities reporting the seizure of 584,650 tablets in 1999 compared to 171,000 in 1998. In May 2000, Belgian authorities discovered an Ecstasy tableting site, seizing 450,000 tablets as well as a sophisticated tableting machine and numerous logo punches. As of May 2000, this seizure constituted a record for Belgium. During 2000, the DEA BCO conducted several successful international controlled deliveries resulting in the arrest of numerous individuals and the seizure 50,000 Ecstasy tablets in January, 12,000 tablets in May, and 20,000 tablets in June.
- In Luxembourg, 1999 seizures totaled 1,400 tablets compared to 145 in 1998. In December 1999, authorities in Los Angeles, California, seized 32 kilograms (96,000 tablets)¹² of Ecstasy. This shipment had originated in Luxembourg and was the first documented shipment of Ecstasy from Luxembourg to the United States.
- Between January and September 2000, Swedish authorities seized 135,000 Ecstasy tablets. The most significant seizure was made in February 2000, when Swedish authorities arrested four individuals and seized 100,000 MDMA tablets from a Dutch-registered truck in the city of Gothenburg. Norwegian authorities continue to seize increasing amounts of Ecstasy. During 1999, authorities seized 4,667 Ecstasy tablets. Over the first 8 months of 2000, Norwegian authorities seized 24,504 tablets of Ecstasy.
- During 1999, German authorities seized 1,470,507 Ecstasy tablets. According to the *Bundeskriminalamt* (BKA), during the first 6 months of 2000, several large seizures contributed to the more than 719,282 tablets of Ecstasy seized. Many of these large seizures were shipments transiting Germany en route to the United States.
- During the first 6 months of 2000, Spanish authorities and the DEA Madrid Country Office conducted several successful Ecstasy investigations, resulting in the seizure of 169,200 MDMA pills. In February 2000, the Spanish National Police Airport Unit seized approximately 120,000 pills of MDMA in Madrid, Spain. The MDMA was found in the possession of four individuals attempting to board a U.S.-bound flight for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with final destination of Miami, Florida.

¹¹ This calculation was made using the INTERPOL conversion factor of 1 kilogram of Ecstasy tablets by weight equals 3,000 tablets. Dutch authorities reported the seizure as 170 kilograms of Ecstasy.

¹² This calculation was made using the INTERPOL conversion factor of 1 kilogram of Ecstasy tablets by weight equals 3,000 tablets.

- According to Italian authorities, Ecstasy seizures were first made in Italy in 1993. During that year, Italian authorities seized 41,719 tablets. Seizures have increased annually, totaling approximately 286,239 for 1999. Statistics for 2000 have already exceeded the 1999 total. Italian authorities have successfully executed several large Ecstasy seizures. On April 24, 2000, the Italian National Police in Udine, Italy, seized 333,000 tablets of Ecstasy, which had originated in Amsterdam, Netherlands. The tablets were destined for Los Angeles, California. On June 20, 2000, the Italian National Police seized 80,000 Ecstasy tablets from an organization operating in the vicinity of Rome.
- Greek authorities concluded a significant Ecstasy case during September 2000, seizing approximately 52,290 Ecstasy tablets from two European traffickers.
- According to INTERPOL, Ecstasy seizures in the United Kingdom rose exponentially from 304,477 tablets seized in 1998 to 3,993,537 tablets seized in 1999. Within the Ecstasy class of drugs, MDMA, MDEA, MDA, and MBDB were the primary drugs seized. MDMA and analogue seizures had been decreasing over the last few years, but a dramatic upsurge in seizures has been noted since October 1999.
- During 1999, Romanian authorities seized 10,546 tablets of Ecstasy, an increase from 1998 when 4,203 tablets were seized. Statistics for 2000 are likely to exceed the 1999 totals, given the seizure of 10,115 tablets of Ecstasy during February 2000. The tablets were concealed in a package of clothing that was shipped from Hamburg, Germany. The Ecstasy is believed to have originated in the Netherlands.

LAW ENFORCEMENT INITIATIVES

The production, trafficking, and abuse of Ecstasy is a growing problem throughout Europe and

internationally. Over the course of the 1990s, government health and law enforcement officials have developed and engaged in public information and enforcement campaigns aimed at countering the Ecstasy threat. Increasingly, governments and law enforcement entities are turning their attention to cooperative efforts to combat Ecstasy.

On the European Union-level during 1995, EUROPOL initiated the LOGO PROJECT, a data collection effort aimed at identifying and cataloging various Ecstasy logos and seizure-related information for investigative purposes. More than 500 logos were identified in the 2000 edition of the Synthetic Drugs Catalogue.

According to the EMCDDA, as synthetic drug use continues to spread beyond large dance events to geographically diverse clubs, bars, and private parties, public information campaigns will be the most common prevention measure, followed by on-the-spot counseling, outreach work, and crisis intervention.

At the European Union Member State-level, both public information antidrug campaigns and law enforcement initiatives have been designed to target the production, trafficking, and abuse of Ecstasy in Europe.

The Government of the Netherlands has taken steps to combat Ecstasy through the establishment of national interagency teams of investigators, such as the USD, targeting MDMA production and distribution organizations. In addition, in February 2000, the Dutch Ministry of Health launched a new drug prevention campaign. The program targets high school students, and is designed to combat the increasing use of Ecstasy and amphetamine by young people in discotheques and other clubs.

Germany gives high priority to counterdrug law enforcement. German authorities positioned themselves early on to combat Ecstasy smuggling in, and through, Germany, devoting significant resources to the task. German law enforcement agencies remain efficient and effective. Demand reduction programs are active on both the federal

LOGOS

Producers and traffickers of MDMA seek to differentiate their product from others by imprinting the tablets with “brand” logos or symbols. The logos are generally popular images, such as smiley faces and cartoon characters, or brand names, such as “Rolls Royce” and “Mitsubishi.” These recognizable logos contribute to the notion that Ecstasy is a relatively harmless drug. During 1999, the Dutch USD seized Ecstasy with 128 different logos.



One of the more popular logos, “Mitsubishi,” has been seized throughout Europe and internationally. According to EUROPOL, more than 6.5 million tablets bearing the “Mitsubishi” logo have been seized since the organization began collecting logo data. When one “brand” of Ecstasy develops a reputation of quality, other MDMA producers will

utilize the same logo-punch in order to gain market-share. This does not, however, ensure that the chemical composition or active ingredients of the tablets are the same. “Regular customers” who place large orders are reportedly able to special order Ecstasy from the producers and can request customized logos for their tablets.

and state levels in Germany. Antidrug information campaigns targeting parents have been initiated, as have initiatives for school children.

Following an Ecstasy-related death in 1999, the Government of Italy initiated steps toward legislative reform that addressed a variety of amphetamine analogues. Italian authorities also increased enforcement activities at discotheques and clubs. In addition, antidrug public information campaigns targeting all drugs continue to play a central role in the Italian counterdrug strategy.

OUTLOOK

- The demand for Ecstasy does not appear to be diminishing. In the near term, production and trafficking are likely to remain constant or increase to meet the growing international demand.

- In Western Europe, Ecstasy use is moving beyond the confines of the rave and nightclub scenes, and is affecting an increasingly broad cross-section of society. This trend is likely to continue in the near term.
- In Eastern Europe, Ecstasy production, trafficking, and abuse will likely expand in the future, increasing supply and decreasing prices in the region.
- Increased international cooperation regarding international control of Ecstasy precursor chemicals may, in the long term, decrease Ecstasy production.

